Tradeshow (R)evolution

50 Attendance and Revenue Growth Strategies

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Following are the 50 attendance and revenue growth strategies—segmented by category. Mix and match the ideas most relevant to your audience and inspire your own tradeshow (r)evolution.

Introduction

We are at an important crossroads.

The traditional tradeshow was first organized so companies in a specific industry could showcase and demonstrate their latest products and services, meet with industry partners and customers, study activities of rivals, and examine recent market trends and opportunities.

The aisles were walked, RFPs distributed, SWAG (promotional items) displayed, and backdrops erected. Rinse and repeat.

The internet of things—the expansive network of physical devices, vehicles, home appliances, and other items embedded with electronics, software and sensors—has enabled everyone to more easily connect, collect, and exchange data. As a result, the implicit need for a traditional tradeshow is waning.

And yet, vendors still need to sell product, members still wish to meet face-to-face, and associations still rely on non-dues revenue. To meet the needs of these key stakeholders (and many more), we must explore the intersection between evolution and revolution.

Evolution suggests the gradual development of something, especially from a simple to a more complex form, while revolution evokes images of a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way something works or is organized or in people's ideas about it.

While many associations may be tempted to take the slow and steady path forward, the more direct route to attendance and revenue growth, member and vendor satisfaction, and ultimately, greater consumer loyalty and elevated industry reputation is by launching your very own tradeshow revolution.

The 50 growth strategies outlined in this eBook are intended to seed the imagination for what's possible. Tradeshow organizers are urged to intentionally establish event goals and then mix and match the ideas most relevant to their audience to create truly innovative, relevant, must-attend tradeshows for attendees and exhibitors alike.

Tradeshow Transformation

What are the basic tenets of a traditional tradeshow? What challenges have emerged?

For exhibitors: 10-by-10 foot booths with a smattering of larger footprints, each containing a covered and skirted table. The exhibitor displays SWAG and various print pieces. Salespeople are generally in the aisles trying to make eye contact with any professional in the hopes of scanning their badge. A quick assessment helps the exhibitor determine whether the professional is a viable immediate customer (warranting an invitation to enter the booth) or not (in which case there is a quick smile and handshake followed by a refocus on scanning more name badges). Tradeshow success was measured on RFPs (request for proposal) secured, as well as the number of contacts scanned for follow up.

Yet, fewer attendees are coming with RFPs, and with the proliferation of tradeshows that cover overlapping populations, it is hard to feel confident in where to invest resources to be present that will net the most, right contacts.

For attendees: Typically attendees are interested in meeting with a small number of select vendors—perhaps those they have an established relationship with or those they are interested in scouting for a future collaboration. Attendees may have further interest in browsing what other solution providers have brought to the tradeshow, but they are forced to navigate the tricky dance of learning more without being stopped every five feet to be scanned or pitched.

On the other hand, some attendees are less proactive. They're in it to get their tradeshow passport stamped (allured by the promise of cash and prizes) or to collect the coolest SWAG (often used as rewards or gifts for their colleagues or children). Many also come with no specific challenge or needs, with no specific learning or networking goals, and may even feel that the hours dedicated to the tradeshow are a waste of time (except, of course, for the meals offered on the show floor). This is particularly true when a tradeshow is embedded in a larger conference, and all learning and other activities are put on hold during tradeshow hours. For attendees who pay high registrations and cover the costs of travel/hotel, this can seriously affect the reflections of impact of the overall conference.

For sponsors: Sponsors are recognized mainly by logo placement in key areas, supporting a theory that the more a buyer sees a logo, reminding them of the sponsor investment, the more likely they will do business with that sponsor. Today more than ever, sponsors, who are often exhibitors themselves, wish to be recognized with direct attendee contact for the greater investment they've made. Increasingly, they desire recognition that goes beyond logo placement, along with an easy way to translate the ROI (return on investment) of sponsorship back to their supervisors. Sponsors are being asked to sponsor more things by more groups—and even the deepest pockets have their bottom.

For associations: There's an ever-growing concern about losing the significant revenue stream the tradeshow brings in each year. Associations are in the incredibly difficult position of balancing the needs of exhibitors who want more hours (to get more leads), attendees who have walked the floor in the first day or two and want to get back to their meeting (or home), while often the tradeshow ends with attendees disappearing, frustrated exhibitors packing up early, and a single big prize or two you can only win if you stay until the end. And the association? They are hoping that all parties remember the first moments of the attendee rush onto the floor rather than the last dregs of business at the tail end.

Additionally, an increasing number of competitors, both for-profit and non-profit, are entering the space once occupied solely by the association's show, causing vendors and attendees alike to make difficult attendance choices.

If any of this sounds familiar, fear not. You and your organization are not alone in the challenges facing the traditional tradeshow model. Inherently, we know that passive sales from behind a table in a booth is a tradition on the path to extinction.

As you explore the concepts presented in each section of this eBook, your goal should not be for comprehensive adoption. Rather, you should consider the tenets behind each idea and take them back to your team for analysis, adaptation, piloting, adoption, evaluation, and continual improvement.

If the tradeshow is to survive, which we still feel is vital to the future of vendors, members, and associations alike, it must not simply shed decades-old habits and practices for new ones that become fixed traditions. Instead, we must experiment, innovate, and play—connecting those in our memberships facing challenges with the solution providers, vendors, exhibitors, and sponsors.

Before we jump into the 50 approaches to tradeshow innovation, Simon Sinek might suggest that we first start with why:

- Why do we have tradeshows in the first place?
- Who are the stakeholders that make up the tradeshow universe?
- What are their metrics of success?

Why a Tradeshow?

In the simplest terms, our association members face workplace challenges and ultimately endeavor to find solutions and solution providers to those challenges that best align with their missions, visions, values, budgets, and operations. Associations, which are intended to be the voice, community, marketplace, and home for an industry, want to be the platform for matchmaking members with solution providers. A tradeshow can be the focal point for these connections to take place and for the subsequent transactions to be initiated.

People used to attend tradeshows because they couldn't find solution providers, including a specific contact or representative, any other way. This was pre-internet. As a result, the traditional tradeshow model became exceedingly transactional in nature. Technology has simplified the finding and reaching of solution providers, and yet the purpose of our tradeshows remains substantially the same.

Conversely, if tradeshows evolve from purely transactional to exceedingly relational, they will likely not just survive, but thrive. In this re-imagined environment, in a year where forming relationships that lead to partnerships is a daily activity, the tradeshow is a concentrated opportunity to seed and reinforce those potential partnerships that will serve all parties well back at home. The emphasis is on developing relationships, trust, and loyalty over the long run, as opposed to the quick sale.

Stakeholders and Success Metrics

Before we can imagine a new tradeshow model, it's important to first evaluate the key players—who they are and their visions of success. Following is a broad overview of four stakeholder groups. You may wish to further expand on these profiles to make them more specific for your organization and/or industry. The more accurately you can build out their personas and track their journeys, the easier it will be to identify and implement the right tradeshow approaches to meet their needs.

	Who are they?	Success Metrics
Attendees	Attendees may be members or nonmembers. While there is often correlation between membership and tradeshow attendance, most organizations recognize the worth of inviting those who may never join but are still interested in the marketplace. They may be individuals or representatives of larger companies. Attendees may come with an immediate need or they may attend not knowing what needs they will face in the future—looking to explore the marketplace and expand their network of solution providers for future challenges. Attendees may be seasoned professionals who know how to work the floor—visiting old provider "friends," thanking past solutions providers, and seeking out specifically vetted companies. They may be emerging professionals with new buying power, not yet sure who to talk to and overwhelmed at the nature of it all.	Ability to easily find and meet with solution providers they know they need to visit. Ability to meet future solution providers, making connections and relationships today that will pay off when problems arise tomorrow. To not be inundated with scanners and sales pitches as they walk the tradeshow floor. Relevant opportunities to learn and network. Feeling like the tradeshow was a good investment of time and money. Leaving the tradeshow with a sense that it enhanced their overall meeting experience.

	Who are they?	Success Metrics
Exhibitors	Exhibitors bring solutions to the table that answer attendee needs. They could be a new sales rep of a large company, a subject matter expert who can speak at length and depth to the impact and nuances of the recommended solution, or they may be the CEO/owner of a small, start-up company trying to break into the space with their new innovation. Whether they have a small or large marketing budget, exhibitors are closely watching those funds in a business world that continues to cut back. They are being asked to exhibit by a growing number of organizations, and subsequently are focusing now more than ever on ROI. They are not only looking to engage with their current customers, but to meet their customers of tomorrow.	Historically, success was measured quantitatively—how many leads were scanned? Qualitative success has grown to include: • Which relationships were reinforced? • Which relationships were forged? • Which future relationship seeds were planted? Building their reputation as a thought leader—that they are the expert and go-to in their specific area. Getting more value from the association and its members as compared to the investment to exhibit. Exhibit time is spent in dialogue with clients and future clients or learning about competition, trends, and research. Preferential treatment or status is granted for show and association loyalty. Greater brand awareness of who they are and positioning of what they do in the marketplace.

	Who are they?	Success Metrics
Sponsors	Industry partners who purchase recognition opportunities with or without an exhibit space. For some this may be a factor of economics—how to still be present and build awareness at an event when they cannot afford exhibiting. For others, this could be an approach that differentiates them, providing a unique experience or branding opportunity that delivers a greater impression than simply row after row of 10-by-10 foot booths. They may be represented at the show or they may be there in name only.	Expanded awareness of the company and the solutions they provide to attendees. Direct contact by attendees who, on seeing the sponsoring company, wish to find out more information. Opportunities to make unique impressions on attendees. For repeat sponsorship, the opportunity to be viewed as 'loyal' by the membership Industry and organization recognition for the sponsorship.

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Who are they?</th><th>Success Metrics</th></tr>
<tr><td>Association</td><td>The organizations that have been formed to represent an industry, typically through some form of membership model.

These organizations strive to be the one-stop-shop for what their members need:

• Where members first turn and have the greatest trust for finding the right solutions to the problems they face.
• Where members of a particular industry can have a stronger collective voice.
• Where professional success can be found through a myriad of learning and networking opportunities.</td><td>Attainment of all financial and non-financial goals, including attendance, engagement, and satisfaction.

Be the leading marketplace for vendor-customer connection and transaction.

Present industry research, solutions and innovations.

Invite the right tradeshow attendees and deliver a memorable, positive, and ROI-rich experience.

Attract the right vendors—those who present effective, forward-thinking products and solutions in a welcoming fashion.

Solicit the right sponsors both to elevate the attendee experience and to deliver a positive sponsor return.

Customize the tradeshow experience without overcommitting resources.

Identify the right tradeshow model and number of hours to keep all stakeholders engaged and satisfied.

Positively impact the industry and fulfill organizational vision/mission through the relationships and transactions enabled at the tradeshow.</td></tr>
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Onward and Upward

At its most fundamental level, the tradeshow experience provides a space to convene these four stakeholder groups. To truly create a concentric circle of success that not only meets but exceeds their varied needs and expectations requires intentionality. As you proceed through this eBook and explore the various tradeshow ideas and models, remember to ask yourself or discuss with your colleagues the following questions:

1. Who are we serving and how will they measure success?
2. What is our vision of success for the tradeshow as a whole?
3. What tradeshow models do we believe are best positioned to support our stakeholders?
4. Will any audience segments be disenfranchised by this model shift?
5. Where can we pilot some of these models on a small scale to gauge their impact?

Remember, change can occur both through evolution (slow and steady) and through revolution (dramatic and wide-reaching). Finding the right models and developing the right implementation timelines for your organization and its key stakeholders requires a mix of art and science. To the extent that you can create an affordable experiment that allows key stakeholders to experience the new solution with opportunities for feedback and continuous improvement, the greater the chance of long-term success.

No matter which ideas ultimately speak to you, they are sure to provide a fresh perspective on an industry model that has served us well for decades but is now in rapid decline. Tradeshow (r)evolution is not an item for tomorrow, it is a critical topic for today. Take this opportunity to browse, discuss, and experiment—and watch as you see increased engagement from all stakeholders in your dynamic, welcoming, and meaningful tradeshow marketplace that prioritizes solutions and relationship development.

A. Career Services

Flashback

Think back to your first professional job interview. Hopefully that's something you can chuckle about now. At the time, however, it probably seemed like an insurmountable feat. Inevitably, there was a laundry list of things to consider and prepare as the nerves set in:

- How should I format my resume?
- Have I managed to make my limited experience seem as attractive as possible?
- What questions will they ask during my interview?
- What are the "correct" responses they're looking for?
- What should I wear?
- What route will I take to get there and where will I park?
- To send or to not send a thank you note?

For many young and emerging professionals, school didn't prepare them for this next step in their careers and their parents may not be familiar with the ins and outs of their children's chosen industries. As professional associations, we can fill a very important void for those just starting out (as well as those considering our industries while still in high school or college).

Whether looking for a job, preparing for an interview, refining a resume or developing sought-after knowledge, skills, and competencies, associations and their tradeshows offer an environment rich with experience and possibility. They're also buzzing with gainfully employed people and prospective employers. With so many people convening in one location, it's almost a shame not to take advantage of this opportunity.

We're not just talking about the next generation of leaders. Career-span learning would suggest that, at minimum, there are three career phases:

- The junior professional who is focused primarily on the technical aspects of their field;
- The mid-career professional who is focused on both technical mastery and on the early development of their managerial skills; and
- The senior professional who typically atrophies in terms of technical skills, but actively seeks mastery of managerial skills and has a new focus on leadership development.

While the senior professional has likely developed a deep network of both learning and networking opportunities, the mid-career professional looking to advance (in terms of position, salary, and responsibility) often has a difficult time making this transition. As aspiring executives, they require a whole new set of career services uniquely designed to support their next big move.

So instead of reinventing the wheel or developing a whole new stand-alone program, product or service, pump renewed energy, excitement, and value into the annual tradeshow. Exhibitors will appreciate the additional traffic and employee prospecting opportunities; attendees will clamor for the career services and support; and the association will become a go-to resource for those on either side of the job market.

Approaches

Following are 10 of the possible approaches your organization could consider as it explores a career services focus as part of its next tradeshow.

1 Job fair or postings

A job fair, commonly referred to as a career fair or a career expo, is an event in which employers, recruiters, and schools provide information to potential employees about current and future industry job openings. This could be coordinated as a separate experience on the tradeshow floor or exhibitors could be given special recognition within their exhibit space designating them as having one or more job openings.

Job postings provide less face time between employers and prospective employees. Essentially, job applicants stop by the designated job postings boards to peruse the available job opportunities and drop off their resumes as a first step in the application process. Employers stop by throughout the tradeshow to pick up, review, and respond to the submitted resumes.

2 Employer presentations

Employer presentations offer the perfect partnership between employers and prospective employees. Several 15- to 20-minute presentations are scheduled in a designated area for employers to showcase their current and future job openings, as well as to answer any questions raised by potential job applicants. Employers have the opportunity to curate a visual presentation, as well as disseminate any additional information in print and electronically.

3 Mock and screening interviews

Mock interviews are typically scheduled in 15-minute intervals and incorporate a five minute break following each interview. Volunteers may sign-up for one-hour time slots and commit to conducting three interviews during that time. The interviews occur at small cafe tables in a common area and interviewers are provided with a series of recommended questions from which to choose. Feedback is provided to mock applicants at the end of each interview.

In addition to mock interviews, actual employers seeking to screen or interview applicants for available positions may wish to have some private space for which to conduct these conversations. The opportunity is a win-win. For employers, the convenience of interviewing a pool of candidates onsite during the show cannot be underestimated. And job seekers—particularly those who land jobs—link their career journeys directly to your association.

4 Resume reviews and bank

Attendees are encouraged to drop off their resumes to the designated area. They write their name and cell phone number on their resume if not already included. Volunteers review resumes using a tip sheet curated by the association. The reviewer's contact information is provided to the attendee, along with resume edits. Resume owners are welcome and encouraged to follow up with questions. Volunteers commit to 30-minute increments and review as many resumes as they can during that time.

Beyond resume reviews, you could also create a resume bank. A resume bank is a repository for a number of different resumes organized and displayed for a single job title that prospective employees can search and review. The variety helps job seekers consider new and different ways to organize their content and describe their experiences. Resumes can be collected from any and all association stakeholders willing to contribute this documentation. Key contact or identifying information can be redacted, as necessary.

5 Visualizing your career

Throughout their career, professionals may continually develop and refine what role they want in the future—short or long term—but may not necessarily have a picture of how to get there. Exhibitors or those who have had successful career steps can volunteer short time segments to provide coaching perspectives to those trying to visualize what's next and what's ahead. The association can provide reflective questions that can guide an approach of—what is a role you aspire to? With that in mind, what do you need to learn? What skills do you need to acquire? Who do you need to meet and build as a network? Now let's identify a number of ways you will pursue that growth. Mapping out those steps on a timeline with milestones to be achieved creates a path for the professional to pursue.

6 Aspiring executives lounge

Baby Boomers are heading into retirement in droves. Professionals of all ages are eyeing the corner offices vacated by these senior-level positions. Chances are many aren't quite ready for the next step in their career journey. The challenge is two-fold: both how to prepare and participate as an applicant in an executive search and how to attain the C-suite learning experiences often absent at traditional conferences. By partnering with both active and retired executives, as well as senior-level exhibitors, you can create a robust learning and networking environment for aspiring executives and even seed potential longer-term mentor relationships.

7 Skill development

We're often drawn to a particular industry because we are passionate about the work or we wish to serve a particular demographic. Over time, however, employees are often promoted from junior-level jobs where they get to do the work they love to mid-career and, ultimately, senior-level positions in which much more of their time is focused on leadership, human resources and other management responsibilities (e.g., negotiation, budgeting, and supervision). Create a safe space by partnering with exhibitors and members with expertise in these areas to deliver targeted education focused on attendee-centric professional development at the appropriate career stage.

8 A day in the life

Identify the major job titles/career paths for your industry and select well known/representative members and exhibitors who have made a living in those roles. Partner with a graphic recorder who will interview each representative and translate the conversations into images and text on large sheets of paper. The finished products can not only be displayed throughout the exhibit hall as an additional source of decor, but they can also be photographed, and the images can be used in association publications and other collateral.

9 Managing up and down

Middle managers often find themselves in a unique situation in which they must effectively fulfill the directions and needs of their supervisors while translating, monitoring, and supporting assignments to their subordinates. The push/pull can often be overwhelming. Utilizing a Dear Abby format, attendees write down their most pressing challenges and drop them off at the designated location. Throughout the tradeshow, these can be placed on a blank poster where a cross-section of association members and exhibitors can walk the floor, answering each one. A summary is comprised and featured in the association's magazine and a follow-on presentation is scheduled utilizing the answers as the agenda for the session.

10 Culture campfires

When you are interviewing for a new position, it can be incredibly difficult to determine the actual culture of the organization. Once you are there, if a change in culture is needed for success, that can be a high hurdle. This activity can have a small show floor area where seating is in an intimate circle, and throughout the day various elements of company culture are scheduled (10am—transparency, 11am—accountability, etc.). For 15 minutes, an industry leader or experienced exhibitor will lead an open discussion, available to those who attend until the seats are filled, of how that element of culture can be detected, seeded, and grown.

Dollars and Cents

Careers are important. They're how we build personal experiences and reputations, as well as how we earn money, support our families, and impact the world around us. And yet very few people are actually talking about how difficult it is to find good work and to ultimately climb the career ladder.

Add to this the seemingly constant shortage of the "right people" to fill jobs at all levels of our organizations—and it's clear we have a real problem on our hands. Talent is scarce. Professional associations can be the catalyst for finding and training good talent, coaching them about the job market and finally connecting them with prospective employers.

Consider the role your organization currently plays in this idyllic picture. Chances are there's room to improve. We hear you. If the solution is not directly correlated to increased revenue, chances are slim a project like this would be green-lighted. It often comes down to a conversation about dollars and cents.

Like many of the approaches outlined in this eBook, not every idea is a direct source of revenue. And, rightfully so. The best solutions for an under-performing tradeshow often balance new ideas or initiatives that directly result in new revenue, indirectly result in new revenue, or don't result in new revenue at all (but are simply the right thing to do for one or more key stakeholder groups at that particular time).

Consider this: If you currently have a stale tradeshow on your hands, you are fighting an uphill battle. It's not as though one change one year at one tradeshow is going to have a profound impact. However, if exhibitors and attendees take note of the changes you make (however big or small) and derive value from them, not only are they more likely to return the following year but they're also much more likely to tell a friend or colleague about their experience.

Slowly, over a three-year period of time, your reputation builds. Maybe you earn a reputation for being the go-to resource for career services or maybe more broadly your association earns a reputation for being an industry leader, innovator, or trailblazer. Either way, this organic marketing by industry influencers bolsters brand recognition and cannot be bought—or underestimated.

Increased attendance and revenue—the very thing every executive tells us they need more of—is thus achieved by leading the horse (or, in this case, the exhibitors and attendees) to water, not by forcing it to drink. Be it career services or another tradeshow (r)evolution tactic, what's going to attract the biggest bang for your buck?

B. Customer Voice

Introduction

Although each stakeholder group is needed for a tradeshow to be successful, ultimately, the potential buyers are the key audience that need to show up and stay engaged for the tradeshow premise to succeed. As such, the typical tradeshow set up of vendors and solution providers in rows of booths echoes a grocery store, where the shopper can peruse the aisles and 'fill their cart' with the items they want to take home.

Instead, the experience is often that when walking the aisles, the voice of the solution provider leads instead of the buyer. We have designed a floor where the solutions are all out there and the buyer is left to pick and choose while trying to navigate/ avoid the wrong solutions—being stopped for conversations they don't want to have.

We live in a world where we want the solutions to our problems segmented and customized to us, and not the other way around. Entering into a space where the premise is you have a challenge, the answer is out there somewhere, good luck finding it—is much different than come to the tradeshow, let's listen to your voice and concerns, and then we can help you solve them with the right conversations and meetings.

Who is the voice leading? The solution provider? Or the buyer? Remember—success is ultimately determined when the buyer finds the right solution for the right problem/opportunity—it is their focus that guides those relationships.

These approaches are based on a customer-voice-first premise. By prioritizing solving buyer challenges, but creating space where it is their personal situation that is a focus—the tradeshow can become a place of tailored, personalized partnerships rather than strolling the aisles, hoping the right solution catches your eye.

Approaches

11 Reverse tradeshow

Instead of your attendees walking the exhibit floor, let the exhibitors come to them! Before the show begins, the association allows attendees to request the exhibitors they would like to meet with and then assesses independently what conversations could be helpful. During the reverse tradeshow, each attendee is seated at their own table and exhibitors come to meet with them for short periods according to personalized schedules. Exhibitors get to meet with attendees that are the best matches for them and attendees don't have to brave the aisles to find the exhibitors with whom they want to connect.

12 Stakeholder needs auction

Sometimes your attendees know which exhibitors they want to meet with, but often they don't know what and who they don't know. When this happens, you can create a space for a stakeholder needs auction. Each round starts with an auctioneer (and yes, you can get a real auctioneer!) who will rattle off the details of the organization that is coming to the auction block. The attendee takes the microphone and explains the need they are auctioning off in as much detail as possible. Exhibitors attend and, if they feel like they have the right solution, can connect directly with the attendee for a conversation. Exhibitors should be clear that connecting with an attendee where the fit is only peripheral will be viewed poorly by all parties involved—the auction is about quality of connection, not quantity.

13 Needs assessment

Your attendees may come to the exhibit floor with a specific problem but without a fully fleshed-out specification document or request for proposal outlining what they will need to solve that problem. A needs assessment appointment matches the attendee with an exhibitor 'consultant' who will work with them to create a fully formed needs assessment. Perhaps this exhibitor will be the right solution partner and perhaps not. Either way, they will have formed a stronger relationship and the attendee will be better prepared to find the right answer to their problem.

14 Review my XX (feedback loops)

Hat tip to 100Reviews, who is leading the charge in review sites. There is nothing like getting honest feedback from your peers—especially in an age where we all decide where to invest our time and money based on likes, stars, and reviews from strangers. In the review pavilion, any tradeshow participant—attendee or exhibitor—can put forth a product, program, service, experience, structure or the like for review by their peers. There are a number of time slots where the items to review rotate so attendees can come back again and again to give feedback on different submissions. If possible, attendees and exhibitors can be paired to review products together—talking about each and giving mutual feedback.

15 Mini-masterminds

The most valuable part of belonging to an association community is having a safe space where you can bring your challenges and have a host of peers that can provide experience and knowledge to help you find the solution you need. What better place to create this kind of interaction than the tradeshow? There are two approaches that could work here:

- Invite attendees when they check in to share one challenge they are facing either in their organization or in their career—and then offer those (without the attendee name included) to the exhibitor and/or attendee population asking who has experience/insight for each problem. The host then organizes a space and time where the attendee with the challenge is matched with the self-identified attendees/exhibitors who help workshop a solution path.
- Alternatively, advertise a space and time for attendees and exhibitors who are interested in serving as problems solvers. Design the space so there are small groups that can engage with one another. Invite an attendee to share the biggest challenge they are currently facing either in their organization or in their career and invite all others to consult and help problem solve. The focus can be on a single person or you can keep the time short and rotate around the group so each person gets a turn.

16 Top need feedback loops

What are the subject categories your exhibitors cover? During the course of your tradeshow, collect from attendees (using social media, event app polling, text polling, staff roving reporter interviews and the like) what their perceived top need is in a select category, and then rotate categories throughout the show. Exhibitors can walk away with the top three needs they should be addressing given their solution set and a platform from which they can create thought leadership pieces after the show concludes to address those needs. Meanwhile, attendees can see the issues their peers are facing in each subject category and know they are not alone in what they are facing. They may even be able to serve as best practice resources if they have successfully resolved the problems within their own organizations.

17 Attendee live polling

There is a reason that our society has become obsessed with surveys. We are constantly looking for insight and feedback from our stakeholders and customers on what they are facing and how the solutions we provide can and do meet their needs. What better space to get the pulse of customer perspective and need then when they are in person at the tradeshow? Solicit broad questions from your exhibitors—topics for which they would benefit from hearing and better understanding the attendee perspective. These are not product or company specific, but rather higher-level questions affecting the industry. Throughout the show, solicit input to those questions on a live, virtual input medium (e.g., the conference app or social media). Display the answers as they are received for the whole tradeshow to see and discuss.

18 Idea Olympics

Ask your keynote speaker to submit a problem/opportunity facing your industry that correlates to their presentation. Following the keynote session and during a traditionally slow tradeshow time, ask each attendee to go to the booth number indicated on their badge. Together, the attendees and the exhibitors should co-create an idea that responds to the keynote query. These ideas should then be submitted to the organization, reviewed by an independent panel of peers (perhaps the Board of Directors) and then "medals" should be given at the end of the conference as the bronze, silver, and gold ideas are shared (maybe during a closing keynote session). All the ideas can then be summarized into an article for the next issue of the organization's publication.

19 Catching exhibitors doing something right

There are exhibitors that are a cut above the rest—that go above and beyond the call of duty to help an attendee, that provide amazing customer service right there on the show floor or that spend time with attendees to help them even when they know they will not be the solution provider that will get the contract. These are the exhibitors that all attendees want to see and will remember for years to come. Empower your attendees to nominate these exhibitors for recognition at the show—sharing who it is and what they did. This may not be a recognition that is given every year—and that is okay. It should, however, be an award that is prestigious—that other exhibitors will aspire to achieve.

20 Exhibitor invitation

Often exhibitors will throw receptions after the tradeshow hours have ended and invite their key and prospective clients to attend. Consider what it might be like on one night of the meeting to have the host organization throw a reception focused on attendees and to have the exhibitors attend by invitation only. Board members or other volunteers could be assigned to walk the tradeshow floor to thank and invite exhibitors, or attendees could be encouraged to invite their exhibitor partners. Providing attendees with a nice invitation they can hand-deliver to their vendors helps elevate the experience. Ideally, all exhibitors can receive an invitation—the very act of inviting serving as a measure of gratitude for their support.

Alternatively, invite exhibitors who are long-standing supporters of your organization to participate in a cohesive "hall of receptions," with each hospitality suite uniquely themed in terms of decor, music, food, and beverage to generate a fun, strolling dinner experience without the hassle of offsite travel.

Conclusion

Whether you incorporate one or a number of these approaches, any of them hold within a greater likelihood of a personalized experience. In the end, if your buyer attendees walk away and reflect that they were able to find a space where the challenge that they were personally facing was addressed, with specific solutions that could fit their company's unique needs, that can be a significant factor to consider when they decide which show to attend in coming years.

Additionally, though elevating the buyer voice implies in someway dampening the voice of the exhibitors, the opposite is usually true. Instead of your exhibitors being forced to quickly assess each person who may just walk by their booth, any of these approaches will allow them to better align where the solution they offer is a best-fit match to the right customer. That means the leads they go home with are more likely to turn into business.

Remember to also use the lens of sponsorship with these approaches. Where you create space for the sharing of challenges and the co-creation of solutions to those challenges—those are spaces where a sponsor could see their investment not just be a logo on a banner, but where they are supporting innovation and partnership that will drive organizations and an industry forward.

Finally, these approaches, which can often result in personal narratives of innovative solution ideas and discovering the right partners, can be prime opportunities for an association to better tell the story of why their tradeshow is more than a seller-buyer marketplace. Capturing and amplifying stories of success, where the customer voice is elevated, will both encourage other buyers to attend to experience personalized solutions as well as vendors to participate where they will find a more aligned process of matching their expertise with customer need.

In the end, the better you can not only bring all the players together in the same space, but help them find the right matches and conversations, the more their narratives will encourage others to participate.

C. Experiential

Vacation Memories

Recall your last vacation (or even staycation). Did you spend time in your local community or did you travel to someplace new? Was this location domestic or international? What mode of transportation did you take to get there? While traveling and sightseeing, what specifically engaged your senses? What did you see? Smell? Hear? Taste? Touch?

In April, Aaron had the opportunity to celebrate his birthday in Texas. He arrived by plane from Kalamazoo, Michigan and stayed for nearly two weeks. Destinations included the Dr. Pepper Museum, the Fort Worth Zoo, the American Airlines Arena, the Globe Life Park in Arlington, and the Whiskey Ranch.

His senses were overwhelmed by his surroundings. He saw an old well originally dug by Baylor students and used to source fresh water for Dr. Pepper's signature flavor, he smelled the distinct aroma of animals (and all that entails!), he heard P!nk perform a number of her number-one hit songs, he tasted the most delicious hot dog while watching the Texas Rangers play ball, and he threw his way to a cornhole victory while sipping an old fashioned.

Now consider for a moment how your getaway made you feel.

Questions Prompts	Your Responses
Who were you with?	
What are some of the things you did?	
What emotions or memories can you recall?	
What did you enjoy most?	
What didn't quite go according to plan?	

Even if you only briefly reflected on this vacation, chances are it wasn't too difficult to recall an experience and the associated memories. In fact, you were likely transported back to the exact day or week. That's the funny thing about experiences—it's almost as if they're hard-wired into our brains. And the more complex the experience happens to be, the more memorable it becomes.

Now let's turn to the typical tradeshow experience. You can likely imagine the traditional 10-by-10 foot booths in rows filling the exhibit hall. Be it 50 booths or 500, everything looks the same: pipe and drape, table, two chairs, and a wastebasket. It's like the cookie-cutter neighborhoods that sprung up post-World War II in response to the millions of families who acquired stable employment but couldn't quite afford the cost of preexisting housing.

And so the unimaginative tradeshow model endures. It's easy on the association, requiring little effort to plan or customize options. It's easy on the exhibitors, as their participation becomes routine from year to year. It's even easy on the attendees, as they come to know what to expect and how to quickly navigate the show floor.

The problem lies in our interest as humans to develop efficiencies. With little change, attendees come to find the shortest distance from entrance to exit—requiring fewer and fewer hours on the show floor to conduct their business. And so what used to be a two- or three-day event requires just a few hours.

As attendees begin to duck out earlier and earlier, exhibitors are quick to pull from the show. And so, signals the decline of the show—both in terms of attendance and in terms of revenue. It doesn't have to be this way.

Approaches

There are many examples of more experiential tradeshows in which the focus is on developing and delivering a quality experience for attendees and exhibitors alike. Following are 10 approaches for consideration. Choosing the right solution(s) depends more on your audience than it does on what's easiest. More on that later.

21 Tradeshow of the future

This experience lends itself to associations and industries that invest in research and development activities. Imagine developing a section of the show floor dedicated to a hotel room or an emergency room of the future. Instead of visiting a booth, you're transported to the room itself with products demoed not on a monitor but in real life.

22 Unique experiences

What might it look like to develop truly engaging and immersive experiences on the tradeshow floor? You may be familiar with the people who flock each year to designer shows during fashion week in cities like New York, London, Milan and Paris. Perhaps you'd setup a runway on the tradeshow floor to showcase an exhibitor's new apparel or uniform line.

23 Innovation/incubation labs

Set up an innovation lab on the tradeshow floor where attendees can bring their most pressing workplace challenge to an expert faculty of exhibitors and industry leaders who will help explore the problem, identify appropriate industry resources for review and consideration, support the exploration of possible solutions, and finally, provide recommendations for prototyping and implementation. The tenets of design thinking would help guide this unique and learner-centric experience.

24 Main stage performances

When's the last time you set up an actual stage on the exhibit show floor? Consider both a stage and a viewing area where you can place comfortable seating and highboys for attendees to congregate while local artists entertain them. Performances might include art, humor, improv, magic, or music. Maybe you'd also provide an open call to attendees and exhibitors to audition. American Idol, anyone?

25 New product showcase

Whether the products are new to market or still in beta, consider a dedicated zone on the show floor to feature new products that attendees can look at, touch, and experience first-hand. You might also offer them the opportunity to meet with developers and manufacturers to ignite a two-way conversation that's both interesting and mutually beneficial.

26 Gamification and competition

Love it or hate it, Pokemon Go is a worldwide phenomenon. And it's cleverly captured the interest of not just gamers, but also those who simply don't like to lose. So leverage gamification in a new and unexpected way. Instead of stopping by each booth to collect a point toward a leaderboard ranking, consider instituting a photo or video scavenger hunt that incorporates attendees engaging in meaningful ways with exhibitors and their products or services.

27 Food and beverage stations

When's the last time someone used the adjective "mouth-watering" to describe the food served on your tradeshow floor? It doesn't have to be doom and gloom! Consider adding tents (maybe even tail-gate themed!) throughout the show floor to serve locally sourced/ authentic meals. Depending on the venue's rules and regulations, you may also consider driving a variety of local food trucks on to or adjacent to the show floor for an unexpected meal option.

28 Health and wellness activities

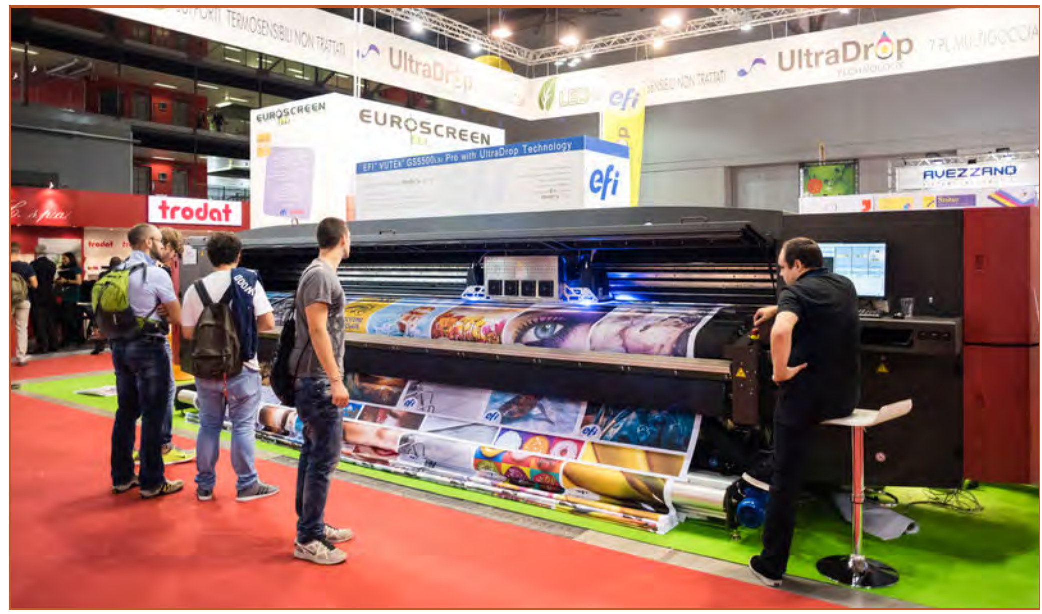
A pavilion can focus on any topic of interest to the show's target audience. In this example, the pavilion might feature health and wellness activities (think yoga and chair massages), as well as food and beverage options (maybe make-your-own granola and infused water). Exhibitor products related to health and wellness can also be featured for attendee exploration. This is an experience sure to quench that mid-afternoon lull, and is particularly relevant given the increased attention to health and wellness by meeting attendees.

29 Red-carpet experiences

Ever consider offering your attendees and exhibitors the opportunity to upgrade their registration to include a VIP experience? At the end of the day, we all like to feel special. Among other things, this could include VIP name badges, SWAG bags and a VIP lounge on the show floor to rest, relax, enjoy light snacks and refreshments, and have an exclusive meet and greet experience with conference speakers.

30 How stuff works

Ever wonder how stuff works? Yeah, us too! So why not bring the printing press or the widget maker to the show floor and provide attendees the opportunity to pull back the curtain and experience first-hand how things are made. Maybe it's simple, like printing a custom shirt. Or maybe it's more complex, like virtual reality headsets and an elaborate plant tour. Either way, attendees are 100 percent interested.



Sound fun, but maybe a bit far-fetched? In reality, each of these 10 approaches are inspired by actual ideas associations are successfully implementing right now to impress and engage both their attendees and their exhibitors. Whether you're able to implement one or more of these ideas in their entirety—or you're simply inspired to action at a size and scale that's reasonable for your organization—the key is to break the mold of "What is" and explore the horizon of "What if."

Floor Plan

Unfortunately, it's not enough to simply add a couple of innovative attendee experiences to the tradeshow floor. As the saying goes, that's like putting lipstick on a pig. Rather, the experiences must be purposefully selected to align with the needs and wants of the target audience, and then must be appropriately integrated into a floor plan that optimizes flow among the various activities and exhibits.

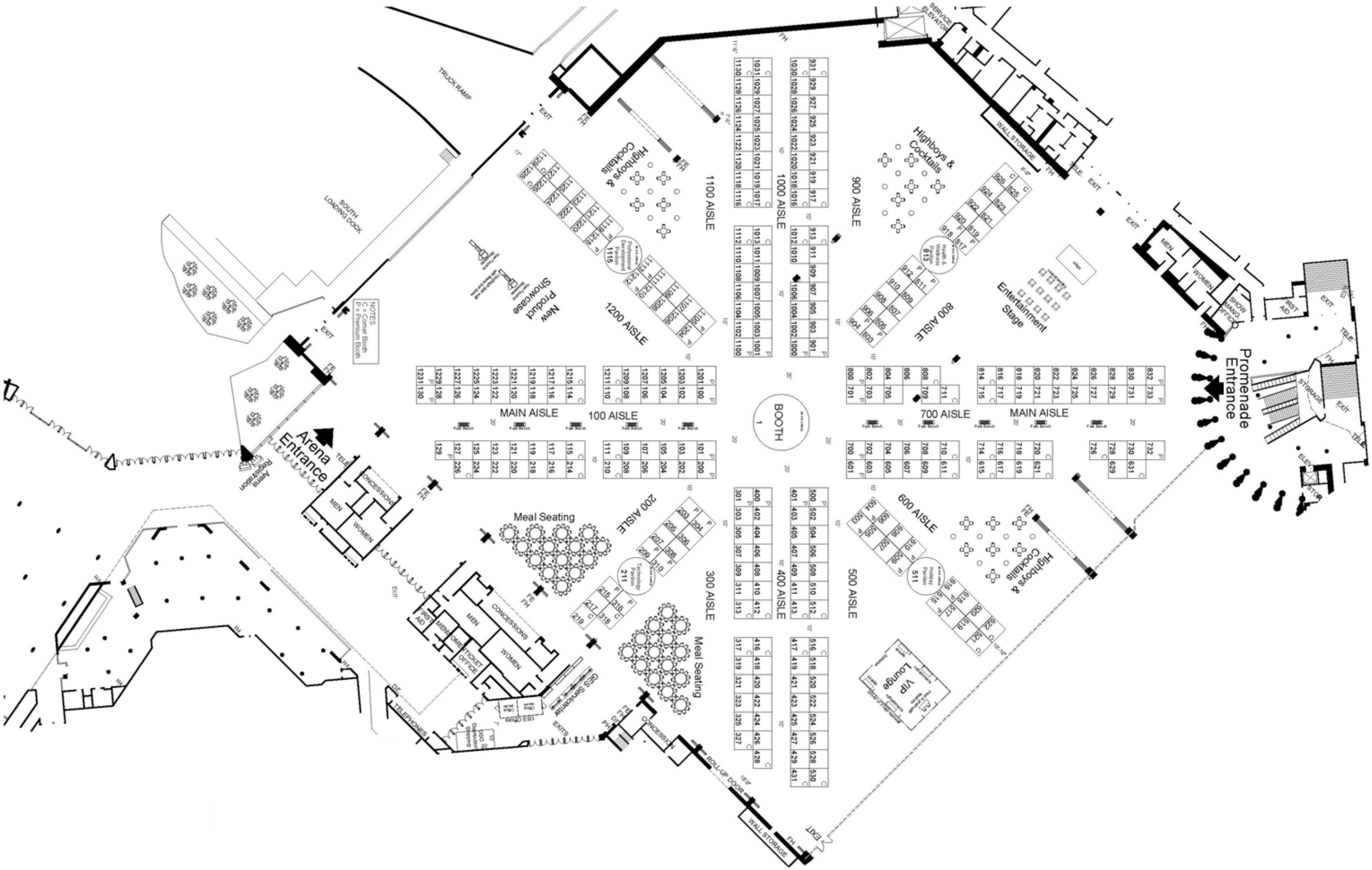
In one association's experience, we learned during a variety of stakeholder interviews and focus groups that the show didn't have sufficient activity to warrant a day-and-a-half event. So instead of adjusting the duration of the show, which was likely to kill the show altogether, we vowed to enhance value and productivity.

In selecting a variety of experiential activities to incorporate into the new tradeshow based on the feedback of both attendees and exhibitors, we worked with our general service contractor to reimagine the traditional tradeshow floor into a much more innovative hub-and-spoke model (see diagram on page 28).

In this plan, all roads led back to the center pavilion, which concentrated on the association and its members. Here, the association's presence focused on:

- Membership (acquisition and renewals);
- Volunteers (current year conference volunteers and those interested in future volunteer opportunities);
- Foundation (donations and engagement opportunities); and
- Conference (specifically the following year's show—destination, registration, and exhibit/sponsor opportunities for pre-sale).

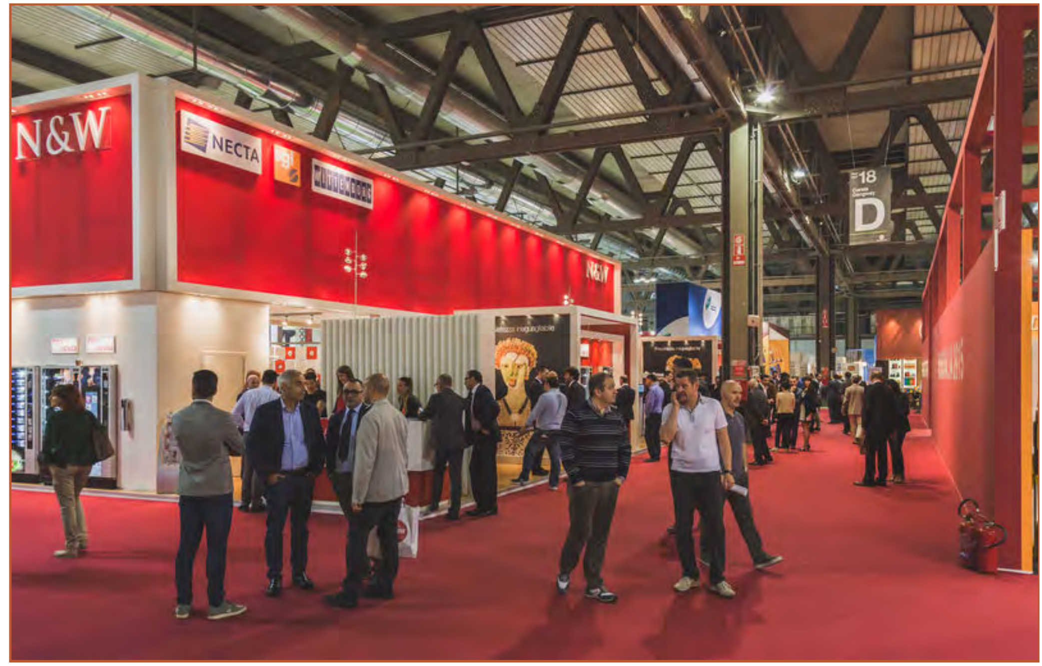
Additional highlights included charging stations, complimentary WiFi, a headshot lounge, and prize giveaways.


Promenade Entrance
Arena Entrance
MAIN AISLE
100 AISLE
200 AISLE
300 AISLE
400 AISLE
500 AISLE
600 AISLE
700 AISLE
800 AISLE
900 AISLE
1000 AISLE
1100 AISLE
1200 AISLE
BOOTH 1
Highboys & Cocktails
Meal Seating
New Product Showcase
Entertainment Stage
VIP Lounge
TRUCK RAMP
SOUTH LOADING DOCK
ROLL-UP DOOR
WALL STORAGE
SERVICE ELEVATOR
CONCESSIONS
MEN
WOMEN
EXIT
NOTES
C = Corner Booth
P = Premium Booth

The balance of the tradeshow floor featured many of the experiential approaches shared in this chapter, including performances by local singer-songwriters, a new product showcase, food and beverage tents featuring delicious and geographically appropriate food options, four different pavilions spread throughout the show floor (each with their own schedules and activities), and a VIP experience/lounge.

As exhibitors registered for this reimagined tradeshow, they were clearly surprised, impressed, and excited by the new booth and sponsor options. Ultimately, we triggered something in their brains that alerted them to something new and different. This signaled a need to ignore what they thought they knew about the show. It caused them to slow down and really explore what was new before determining how they'd like to engage given this more evolved model.

The same was true for attendees. While they still sought the most efficient way to navigate the tradeshow, they couldn't just show up and get through the floor in a couple of hours. Rather, they were interested in the new activities, the new layout, and the new opportunities to engage with exhibitors and their products. And, as a result, we slowly saw their demeanor change from a transactional to a relational mindset.



D. Learning

Create Learning Relationships

The ultimate success of a tradeshow is the development and deepening of attendee-vendor relationships. The goal is to identify and match the right product solutions with the right end-users given the established needs of today and the likely needs of tomorrow. Central to these fact-finding and match-making missions is learning.

Fundamentally, exhibitors want to make a sale (to earn revenue) and attendees want to find the right solutions (to solve a problem). All of the interactions leading up to these final purchasing decisions are improved by the principles of learning. And the way we support these interactions as tradeshow organizers is vitally important to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for exhibitors and attendees alike. Believe it or not, the approach utilized on the tradeshow floor is remarkably similar to the way we make purchasing decisions in our everyday lives.

Let's imagine that disaster has happened. No, not another natural disaster, as fun as *force majeure* is. Rather, you dropped your phone—screen side down on incredibly rough asphalt. As you hope for the best and reach down to pick it up, you notice the screen has cracked into a million pieces and the phone itself is clearly non-recoverable. Before social media withdrawal can set in, what approach do you take to replace your phone? Following are just five considerations you're likely to have before making a final purchasing decision. Then you will see how the same factors apply to the tradeshow setting:

Factor 1: Established knowledge and solution experts. Intentionally or not, you have prepared for this day. You've had your ear open to the market and you've inadvertently learned about the major cell phone providers and what they offer. You have likely read articles or scanned headlines that have kept you in the know regarding advances in technology. All of this has informed your basic knowledge of cell phones and what differentiates each product.

Factor 2: Customer research. After a need is established, it's easier than ever to conduct product research on your own. You also have the ability to quickly scan through a listing of the various solution providers and what they offer, often finding a friendly chat box with a knowledge expert asking what questions you might have that they can answer.

Factor 3: Learning from peers. Before making any purchasing decisions, you likely share a question with your Facebook hive-mind regarding what they are using and why. While we intuitively know that the creators of products are most familiar with their own features, we are just as interested in the experience of our family, friends, and colleagues. For that, we turn to fellow users for their reflections, insights, reviews, and recommendations.

Factor 4: Loyalty matters. If you ask someone how they feel about having an iPhone, you'll likely get a pretty emphatic answer. For those who own an iPhone, they typically know the system and shortcuts well and can easily navigate the ins and outs of the platform to make the most of their handheld everything device. In essence, the time they have spent learning the product has made them an uber-user. As a result, there is a tendency to purchase from within the product line rather than to start learning a whole new system. This important retention insight means that even as the iPhone emerges with new iterations, Apple still rewards customer loyalty by preserving enough of the previous platform so ongoing owners are ahead of the usage curve.

Factor 5: Caring about user experience, not just the sale. Ultimately, the product provider has a vested interest in learning about and optimizing the customer experience. Sales satisfaction and company loyalty stems from excellence in product quality, as well as a positive sales experience and continued robust support after the sales transaction is complete. The more companies know about their customers, the better the experience they can provide before, during and after the purchase.

Through a tradeshow lens:

Factor 1: Established knowledge and solution experts. By working to have the right exhibitors in the room, you will have the subject matter experts who know what challenges the field is facing all in one place at one time.

Factor 2: Customer research. By setting up the right learning vehicles and opportunities, exhibitors can demonstrate their expertise, allowing the buyers to not only get to know their products, but their ability to bring wisdom to the table within the realm of the industry.

Factor 3: Learning from peers. Where possible, learning should incorporate interactive, experiential methodology where buyers can learn not only from exhibitors, but also from each other.

Factor 4: Loyalty matters. Are you creating 'premium learning' opportunities? Either with central locations at prime times for those looking to share their knowledge or limited-capacity venues with highly desired speakers? Acknowledge those who continue to contribute most to the organization through first or exclusive access to these and other learning opportunities.

Factor 5: Caring about user experience, not just the sale. Learning interactions are the gateways to forming stronger exhibitor–buyer relationships without starting with the sale. Instead, learning together is a shared experience where it is easier to have the next conversation.

Though in its traditional format the tradeshow has been designed for transaction, a shift toward learning has the potential to address all five of these factors. With a learning-first approach, your exhibitors can present themselves as thought leaders and solution partners, not just as salespeople.

Moreover, your attendees will have a reason to come back to the floor throughout the show, even after they have completed their intended visits and transactions. They'll seek out the dynamic learning you've planned and will welcome the opportunity to network with attendees and exhibitors in a structured and controlled environment.

Best of all, you can take the powerful attendee reflection and peer feedback that often happens in the hallways of the meeting and create a space on the show floor where such interactions are welcomed and honored. The tradeshow becomes a place where attendees can share their experiences and teach one another alongside their solution partners.

Approaches

As you consider what learning-first approaches will best resonate with your attendees and exhibitors, consider the following 10 ideas as a starting place:

31 Centerstage

Many organizations have already adopted this model of placing a large learning space on the tradeshow floor. These main stage or centerstage settings are typically sold as a sponsorship offering. Several exhibiting companies claim a timeslot and then have the opportunity to present a session to attendees right there on the show floor. This allows attendees to take a break from walking the show floor to sit and learn about an engaging topic while also portraying the sponsoring companies as central thought leaders. For those attendees needing to earn continuing education credits, this also allows the association to offer even more value by extending learning opportunities during traditional tradeshow-only hours.

32 Learning aisle

In this model, while the booths may remain 10-by-10 feet, there is no SWAG or brochures. Instead, each booth has 10 to 15 chairs and is set as a mini-classroom. The exhibitor comes prepared to give a brief five- to seven-minute lesson on a solution set or rising opportunity within the industry. This presentation is not a product sales pitch. Presentations are repeated every 20 minutes, giving time after they present for any interested attendees to stick around for a longer conversation. Additionally, attendees can walk the aisle, getting different bite-sized learning every 20 minutes. If they happen to miss one topic, they can stick around and hear it again later. This helps bring attendees back to the show floor, particularly if the show spans more than one day. Likewise, exhibitors are introduced to prospective clients first as a thought leader as opposed to a salesperson.

33 Interview/talk show style experience

One of the core strengths of your organization is the community of industry thought leaders that belong and participate. If you were to create a list of the top 20 thought leaders—those well established in the industry, those just emerging as a young thought leader, and those representing diverse perspectives and disciplines—would those be people that others would like to hear from? In this approach, create an interview parlor on the show floor and schedule time where each of these thought leaders will be interviewed in front of an audience of attendees. Invite a different exhibitor to interview each thought leader, giving them the role of learning facilitator. As a bonus, these can be recorded/live broadcast (through Facebook Live and other platforms) to reach a wider audience both during and after the show.

34 Innovation challenge

What is a key challenge facing your industry today? What is an opportunity that could shift how your profession looks tomorrow? Often, these questions are not going to be solved in isolation, but through a collaboration between members and solution providers. Create a space on your show floor where a select number of attendees and exhibitors are invited to come together around tables to tackle one of these pre-identified challenges. Help them envision what the future may look like and what steps are needed to get there. These innovation incubators could run a number of times throughout the show, with a different challenge at each. Results could appear in an association publication (e.g., magazine, blog, or website), recognizing the attendee and exhibitor authors.

35 Case study competition

Your exhibitors often have a broad view of the industry, working with a wide range of customers. Invite exhibitors to create a case study competition—a scenario they have encountered or a challenge they have internally discussed. On the show floor, run a competition where teams of attendees are given the case studies, asked to co-create their solution paths and then present their ideas to a team of exhibitor judges. This can also be an opportunity to collect all the solution sets submitted and share them back with the organization—possibly through a presentation later in the conference or via an article that could run in an association publication.

36 Hackathon

Do the members of your industry collect data? If so, they need to mitigate the risk associated with that data being stolen or compromised. Connect with exhibitors that help your attendees mitigate this risk and ask them to bring a handful of "hackers" to your tradeshow—those that can demonstrate the vulnerabilities of a company's system. Offer attendees the opportunity to have these hackers, with their permission, attempt to hack into their systems from the show floor. A live demonstration can share strengths that already exist as well as areas at risk. Those that volunteer their systems would get a detailed report of key findings and recommendations. Attendees who observe this demonstration become aware of the questions they should go back to their companies and ask. Finally, exhibitors who sponsor this *hackathon* are recognized as experts in this field and their products more sought after by buyers.

37 Demographic meet-ups

What are the key attendee segments at your show? Does your audience comprise emerging professionals? What about C-suite executives? How would you identify the diverse categories within your audience? Maybe by discipline, geography, or company size? Although attendees may come to your show because they are affiliated with the industry you represent, creating space for them to further connect with a segment similar to their own presents the opportunity for deeper connections. Depending on the solutions they provide, various exhibitors may be interested in connecting with a specific audience, as well. These meet-ups on the show floor can be informal in nature, focused primarily on conversation. Alternatively, they can be more structured, dialogue-focused roundtables where the exhibitors serve as facilitators and moderators.

38 Demonstration witness/participation

When you are at a tradeshow, what makes the biggest impression? An exhibitor talking about their solution? How about demonstrating their solution? What if you get to use the solution yourself right there on the show floor? For this approach, create a demo pavilion—a space where the attendee will be able to learn about the various solutions by experience rather than by explanation alone. Based on the premise that we learn best by doing, the more interactive the demonstration, the more it will leave a lasting impression on attendees. These pavilions can be dedicated space for specific exhibitors or can be a rotating space where exhibitors are given a time slot to showcase their demonstration and are then asked to invite attendees back to their booth for a further sales conversation. In this scenario, the demo pavilion is a no-sales zone.

39 Book club

Invite exhibitors to pick a book they think speaks to their approach or company philosophy. Allow attendees to sign up either at registration or on arrival to the tradeshow for a book club discussion group. Exhibitors can lead one or more discussions, illuminating some key points in the book and asking attendees to share their perspectives. For attending, exhibitors can give a copy of the book to each discussion group attendee. While this may not be a direct correlation to their product, it demonstrates who the exhibitor is and opens the door for further conversation. Where appropriate, exhibitors may be linked with conference speakers (e.g., keynotes) to drive even more interest and connection to other conference learning experiences.

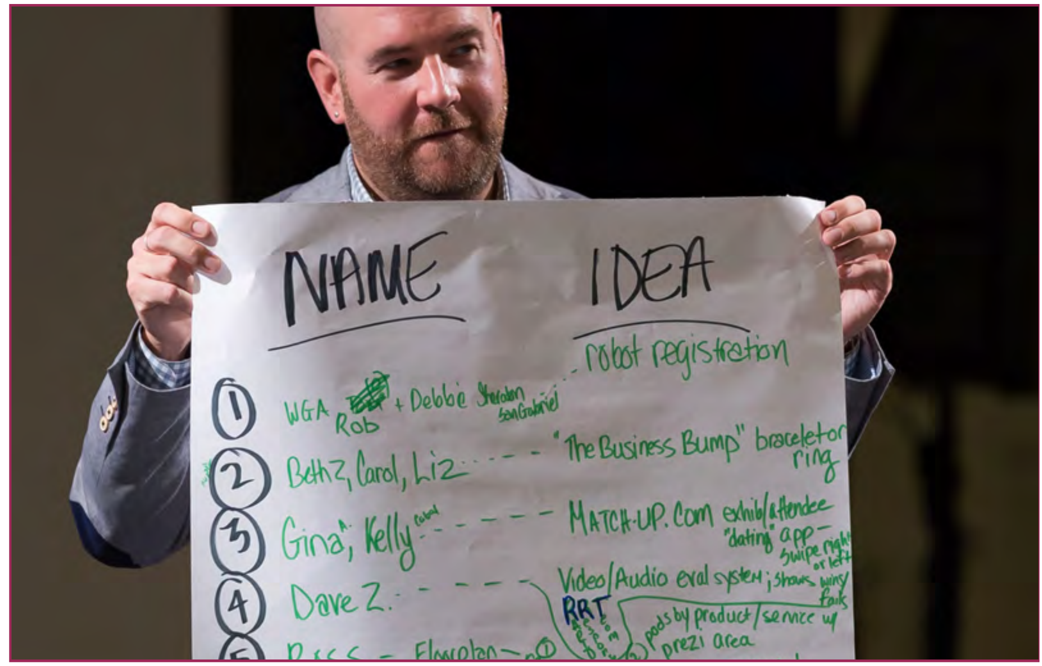
40 Certification domain hotspots

If your industry has a certification or competency framework, you will have identified domains or core competency areas. Structure throughout your tradeshow one or more areas where lightning sessions are facilitated by domain—a brief period of intense review on specific subject matter. Partner exhibitors who are experts in a specific domain with an industry thought leader to lead the learning and to answer questions. Depending on your audience's needs, one area could be established for those who are preparing to take an industry certification and another area could serve as a refresher for those who hold the certification but would like to strengthen their core knowledge based on industry advances.

Building Success through Partnership

Solely restructuring the framework of your show to incorporate learning models is not enough to ensure success. Simply put, vendors are traditionally sending salespeople to your event in order to—you guessed it—sell. A structure shift, such as the one outlined in this section, may give your exhibitors greater opportunity to demonstrate their thought leadership and expertise. This may mean that a different set of representatives is needed to staff your show (or, at the very least, to differently train those who traditionally attend).

As your organization discusses and decides which models to



adapt and pilot, part of that planning should include partnering with your exhibitors to help them understand the new models you will introduce, the opportunities they will encounter, and a consultative series of conversations helping them to appropriately prepare for the show. Simply asking exhibitors to come to the show to lead a discussion and then handing it off to them without support will result in a chaotic array of approaches and results.

A shift to a learning focus will also redefine some of the exhibitor measures of success. The number of badges scanned can no longer be the sole measurement or expectation. Instead, qualitative responses to the following questions should be considered:

- How will the exhibitor better position its expertise within the industry?
- How will the exhibitor forge or reinforce client relationships through learning interactions?
- What knowledge does the exhibitor want to be known for as it relates to their product solution?

These reflective questions should be shared before the show. If possible, they should be discussed in partnership and consultation with each exhibitor. The better exhibitors are able to answer these questions, the better prepared they will be to position and prepare themselves for the show. Likewise, they will be more likely to leave the show talking about the successes they realized through learning engagement.

Finally, the learning approach will only be successful if attendees are prepared to shift their participation from consumer to learner. There may be practical ways to do this depending on the types of learning models you adopt:

- You can choose to offer continuing education credit.
- You can prepare them through pre-event messaging to plan for one or more learning experiences on the show floor.
- You can structure key takeaways as part of the model—something they can tangibly bring back to their teams and organizations.
- You can tie the learning on the show floor back to larger sessions at the conference.

Everyone on the tradeshow floor has something to learn, as well as something to share and teach. If associations are able to carve out space for learning exchanges during their tradeshows, they will undoubtedly seed the relationships that lead to partnerships and purchases.

Speak to most exhibitors and they will say the same thing. Their endgame isn't the one-time sale. Rather, they hope to capture and develop the attendee relationship. They're more interested in a loyal and long-term partnership. Learning is an incredible vehicle for realizing this vision of success.

E. Networking

Building Connections through Networking

Think about the last conference you attended. You likely attended a dozen or so different sessions, spent a considerable amount of time walking the tradeshow floor, and stopped for quick hallway conversations with friends or colleagues. This is, of course, on top of the work demands streaming in by text, phone, Slack, email, and a handful of other platforms.

From a bird's-eye view, the meeting schedule and flow may appear as controlled chaos (with hubs of meals and free food). Yet, at the end of the day, where do we find everyone? If you're anything like us, it tends to be at the conference reception or hotel bar, desperately seeking some downtime to relax, debrief, laugh, and connect.

As humans, we have an innate need to connect with others. There is power in connection. It's why our organizations exist in the first place—and it's why tradeshows remain an important component of our overall portfolio of offerings.

However, left to our own devices, we each default to the comfortable and familiar. Think back once again to the last conference you attended. When you walked into lunch, where did you sit? When you stepped into each general session, were you texting your friends to save you a seat? It is within our very nature to avoid the discomfort of being alone. Though breaking this habit may lead to new relationships, we almost always default to our existing relationships.

The very nature of the current tradeshow model comes up against our desire for comfortable connection. Attendees walk each aisle, maybe with a specific exhibitor in mind or maybe to get a better feel for what solutions are present on the show floor. As they walk from aisle to aisle, there is a sudden tension if they make eye contact with an exhibitor. More times than not the eager exhibitor pounces—seeking another name badge scan or facilitating an unwelcome sales pitch.

As a result, attendees develop a strong desire to push through the show floor as quickly as possible with as little face time as possible. Their discomfort literally drives attendees from the show floor as soon as they've concluded their business and represents a significant barrier to exhibitors developing meaningful relationships with their would-be customers.

When is the last time you bought something because of a slick flyer or brochure? No matter how pretty the graphics are or how expertly the font is chosen, our purchasing decisions today are influenced more and more by relationships rather than print or hard sells. The company producing the program, product, or service should be someone we know we can trust.

Based on this premise, and particularly in support of introverts who require a bit more structure and intentionality to support introductions and relationship-building, we need to incorporate purposeful networking experiences into our tradeshow design.

Networking is one of those ambiguous terms that can mean many different things to many different people. For the purposes of this eBook, we will focus on the following definition of networking:

> *To interact with other people to exchange information and to develop knowledge of corresponding needs and answers, especially to establish and deepen exhibitor–attendee relationships.*

As tradeshow organizers, we want to see meaningful relationships formed on the show floor. Currently we send attendees to the tradeshow, invite them to walk the aisles and wish them good luck in initiating and developing relationships. It's as if they're magically going to happen on their own. Likewise, we send exhibitors to their booths and remind them just how many attendees we've attracted to the show. The onus remains on them to convert attendees into customers. We can do better.

Simply adding "networking" to the words "break," "lunch," or "tradeshow" are not sufficient to create a truly intentional networking environment. At the same time, networking activities don't have to be overly involved—particularly for extroverts who are, by nature, primed to network.

The balance you're trying to strike is enough structure and intentionality to make the networking experience meaningful and engaging (i.e., an excuse or a reason to do it) with the fun and painless nature of casual conversation. Ultimately, it's important to provide enough reason for everyone to participate without making the experience seem contrived, trite, or silly.

Approaches

Following are 10 examples you might consider in reimagining the networking experiences baked into the fabric of your next tradeshow:

41 Ask me about

As each attendee enters the tradeshow, have name badges ready that simply say "ask me about" on top. Have them fill in one thing they would like to be asked about—it could be personal, professional, or trivia. Whatever will help others get to know them better. Underneath this, they should write their first name. As they walk the aisles and encounter new peers—both attendees and exhibitors alike—they can jumpstart a conversation that is less awkward and more personal. While the demographic information of title, company, and geography can follow, starting with a personal insight is also more likely to leave a lasting memory about the new contact.

42 Exhibitor badge games

When attendees are approaching a branded booth, they already know that the exhibitors there are part of that company. Why not provide the exhibitors a fun name badge game to play each day that will help give a bit of personal insight into who they are? All you have to do is provide a fresh name badge sticker to each exhibitor each day of the tradeshow with instructions about what game you are going to play. Perhaps it will be Two Truths and a Lie or you could

ask them to tackle Pictionary by drawing a picture of the problem their solution solves. Whatever approach you choose, attendees will have a fun entry point into meeting exhibitors.

43 Back of the badge match

On the back of each attendee name badge print a solution that one of your exhibitors provides without giving the exhibitor name. While these can be printed at random, it's even better if you have demographic data about attendees and can pair their interest areas with specific exhibitors. Attendees are asked to find the exhibitor whose product provides that solution and, if they are successful in doing so, the exhibitor has a small prize to give them (e.g., an extra drink ticket to the reception that evening). Spread out the solutions so that each exhibitor will have attendees looking for them.

44 Future leaders learning

As the host organization, you may have a group of emerging professionals already identified in a specific leadership track or program. If not, quickly identify such a group by considering those who are highly engaged or by nomination from your more senior members. In either case, find a space on the show floor for this group to sit and meet for 15 to 20 minutes at a time with a select exhibitor. The exhibitors during this time are not trying to direct sell to the attendees, but rather to share their solution in a way that will make a memory or leave a lasting impression. The goal is to seed familiarity and become a go-to resource when an aligned challenge faces these young leaders later in their careers.

45 Mentoring loop

Tapping into a group of emerging professionals, volunteer to match these impressionable attendees with an appropriately aligned exhibitor for micro-mentoring. Your organization would collect from each attendee the topics they would like to discuss in greater detail (e.g., a skill set, an industry domain of knowledge, or career guidance). You can then share this list with exhibitors, inquiring about which has the experience and knowledge to host a 20- to 30-minute micro-mentoring conversation. This opportunity promotes a mutually beneficial relationship in which the attendee furthers their knowledge and the exhibitor identifies a new contact for possible future sales.

46 Tradeshow tour guides

Send an invite to first-time attendees at the tradeshow to come to the entrance of the exhibit hall 30 minutes before it opens. You can include both attendees and exhibitors. Split the first timers into smaller groups and have at least one long-time attendee and exhibitor pair up to lead each group on a brief tour of the hall. Attendee tour guides can share their own strategies for approaching the floor and how they cover the various corners, aisles, and special features. Likewise, exhibitor tour guides can share their perspectives on how to navigate the show, how to approach exhibitors, and what makes a successful experience.

47 It's just lunch

Take the list of all first-time participants at your show—attendees and exhibitors alike—and recruit a corresponding list of volunteers who are willing to have lunch with the first timers. Ideally, you can match them by interest, experience, discipline, or background. While the default may be to match attendee to attendee and exhibitor to exhibitor, consider mixing and matching the participants with the understanding that "it's just lunch" means this is not a sales opportunity. Rather, it's an opportunity to meet a new colleague and to have someone to sit with at lunch in case they don't know anyone else.

48 Photo scavenger hunt

There are many ways to incorporate this fun, competitive approach into the tradeshow experience. On the show floor, form teams of attendees that have to capture certain elements, actions, or people. For optimal impact, you can incorporate aspects that individual exhibitors are planning to feature as part of their booths. For example, if Geico was an exhibitor, one suggested task might be to take a photo of a team member hugging their famous reptile mascot. Alternatively, if you institute a photo scavenger hunt as part of your overall meeting, form teams comprising both exhibitors and attendees and encourage pictures that focus on the meeting location, the social events, or even the meals. By requiring the pictures be posted on a social media platform or in the event app, they can also become a marketing tool for the organization and, in the case of Facebook, a Timehop memory in future years.

49 Cooking and cocktail co-creation

If sharing a meal allows you to get to know a person better, just imagine how much better you'd get to know them after preparing food together! Create a "kitchen area" where rounds of attendees and exhibitors can come together to prepare specially crafted dishes or cocktails. Besides learning a new recipe to take home, this shared experience and memory will serve as a platform for connection and conversation every time they are back together. Celebrity chefs or bartenders may be recruited from the event venue, the surrounding community, or your very own membership.

50 Tradeshow tailgates

Everyone has some kind of pride—whether their hometown, the place they went to school or simply their favorite sports team. Organize a networking time where everyone is invited to wear their favorite hometown sweatshirt or sports jersey—giving a bit of insight into who they are outside of the tradeshow floor. You can continue to theme the tailgate time with games and food. Simply changing what participants wear to less formal attire will inherently invite them to connect on a more personal level with one another.

Meaningful & Intentional

The consistent thread that links each of these examples together is that they're meaningful and intentional. In other words, they have a serious, important, or useful quality and they're deliberate in nature (i.e., they've been organized to fulfill a certain purpose).

Of course, choose the ideas you think will most resonate with your various stakeholder groups or be inspired to create one or more networking experiences on your own. However, note that many of the examples shared in this chapter are tied to name badges, first-time attendees, and fun.

Name badges are a ubiquitous part of every tradeshow experience. Usually, they list a first name in larger letters with a last name or full name below in smaller font size, followed by credentials, title, company name and geographic location. On the tradeshow floor, is the text large enough that an exhibitor a booth away can really read the name of an approaching attendee? Does the lanyard cause the name badge to be too low so as to make interactions between attendees and exhibitors an awkward experience? Consider what changes your organization could implement relative to its own name badges to facilitate more seamless networking among participants.

First-time attendees are a special group of participants who are best served by a bit of white glove treatment. After all, we really want them to return in subsequent years. While those who come to the tradeshow each year know the basic rhythm of your event, those attending for the first time often find the experience overwhelming. Consider ways you can demystify that first-time experience while also baking in connections to long-time attendees and exhibitors.

Finally, fun is an important element of networking. Turning an awkward moment of basic introductions into a fun experience can help participants connect as people first and as colleagues second. While these moments may not be the deciding factor on whether or not to attend a future show, they are often some of the most memorable shared moments. These are the times that often get referenced in future years when members remark, "Remember the flash mob on the show floor six years ago?" Incorporating structured time and space for fun and collaborative interaction will seed future business relationships through collegial friendships forged today.

While each of these ideas focuses on networking within the context of the tradeshow experience, it should also be acknowledged that you can infuse attendee-exhibitor networking off of the show floor, as well. General sessions, meal functions, awards programs, and the like—any of them can include the type of introduction and networking opportunities that would make it worthwhile for an exhibitor to attend and derive value.

Ultimately, opportunities for meaningful and intentional connection don't have to be standalone efforts. Ideally, they can and should be incorporated into each of the 50 approaches identified in this eBook. If the future success of the tradeshow depends on the relationships that attendees and exhibitors forge within the association community, then impactful networking experiences must be at the heart of every show.

Implementation Guide

Are you swimming in the sea of possibilities? When it comes to applying one or more of the tradeshow approaches we've outlined in this eBook to your association's next event, would it be helpful to cut through the clutter and have a clear roadmap to implementation? We thought so too. As a result, we've assembled the following five steps as a recommendation to help you dig into your tradeshow (r)evolution.

By the way, hat tip to the University of Central Oklahoma's Institute for Learning Environment Design who developed The Learning Environment Design for Innovation Model that inspired these steps.

Oh! And one last thing before we get started. We're going to assume here that you've read the eBook. Whether on your own or as part of a staff book club, it's important to first gain exposure to the 50 approaches to tradeshow (r)evolution as a means to open your mind and explore ideas that, quite frankly, might be rather new to you and your organization.

When was the last time you asked members for innovative speaker or content ideas for an upcoming annual conference and they simply shared with you the status quo—stuff they recently saw presented at another event? The ideas are recycled. To find innovation, we often have to escape our current frame of reference and seek suggestions from outside our membership.

While we're not anticipating that you've made any concrete selections just yet, we hope that at minimum you've become familiar with the five major buckets: career services; customer voice; experiential; learning; and networking. You might also have taken the opportunity during a staff meeting to share those that most resonate with you. Regardless, please rest assured that the "right approaches" for you and your constituents will soon reveal themselves.

Step 1: Discover

In this initial step, it's all about the data. So select the tradeshow experience you'd like to explore further and begin to assemble all that you currently know about this event. Chances are there are several post-event reports and survey summaries that haven't been viewed in a while, let alone the other ambient data you've been collecting but haven't really mined.

Start by gathering and analyzing data from survey data surrounding exhibitor and attendee satisfaction. We typically like to see historical data for a three to five year span of time. This includes both quantitative and qualitative data. In your review of the data, be wary of Likert-scale numbers (particularly averages). What does an overall satisfaction score of 4.21 actually mean anyway?

Likewise, when was the last time you summarized and reviewed the trends in the qualitative data you've likely collected over the years? Take the time to really review the data, identify key themes and then write brief summaries highlighting actual participant responses to support each theme.

A note about anecdotal findings before we move on: Just say no. We want to make decisions in this process not based on what we *think* we know about the tradeshow. Nor do we want to implement a new approach based on the strong suggestions of a vocal minority. Instead, let's strive in this step for a "just the facts" approach.

So, in addition to the survey data (which we already have, but we may need to better organize and analyze), let's gather basic data like:

- attendance numbers (broken down by registration type);
- exhibitor numbers (both spaces and representatives);
- revenue (broken down into attendees, advertisers, exhibitors, and sponsors);
- expenses (broken down into major cost centers);
- net revenue; and
- housing pick-up (assuming there's a coordinated room block).

The more history we have here, the better. At minimum we recommend a three to five year span of time. Although changes may only happen incrementally from year to year, you may be surprised to find a 10 or 20 percent attendance decline in aggregate over the last five years.

The final data point we need to explore revolves around engagement. This is an elusive topic often difficult to define and even more difficult to manage. At minimum, we think engagement includes (but is certainly not limited to) the following:

- the number of people on the show floor (both overall and each open hour of the show);
- the number of people stopping by each booth (both overall and each open hour of the show);
- the quality of the interactions between attendees and exhibitors within each exhibit space; and
- the general feeling of loyalty both exhibitors and attendees have as it pertains to participating in your show (think net promoter score here).

To the extent any lead retrieval and previous survey mechanisms might speak to these data points, the better. Otherwise, it may become necessary to craft survey, interview, or focus group questions to gather this remaining information. The more you can build a clear understanding of what currently exists before moving on to Step 2, the better your selected tradeshow approaches will align with constituent needs—resulting in a better and more highly regarded product.

Step 2: Understand

Remember stepping into your mother's or father's shoes as a kid? They were so big and your feet were so small. To get around, you'd step in, scoot to the front of the shoes and simply scuffle forward—

first one foot and then the other. Understanding your members—both attendees and exhibitors—involves much the same process: Stepping into their shoes and experiencing the tradeshow from their perspective.

To gather and record this data, we borrow a tool from the design thinking process called *journey mapping*. After identifying the experience we wish to map (our signature tradeshow), we select our customers or target audiences. Generally, we recommend keeping it simple:

- Audience 1: Attendees; and
- Audience 2: Exhibitors.

From there, we make a timeline (from left to right) of all of the tradeshow touchpoints that each audience encounters before, during, and after the tradeshow. This can be completed as one master timeline inclusive of both audiences or as two separate timelines—one for each audience.

For example, let's consider our attendee audience:

- Before the show, they need to register for the show and we likely send them a know-before-you-go email.
- During the show, they need to pick up their name badges and visit several booths on the show floor. We might also serve them lunch there.
- After the show, they likely receive electronic communication from exhibitors and will need to schedule a handful of follow-up appointments.

By no means is this an exhaustive list. The more specific and detailed you can be, the better. When finished, you score each tradeshow touchpoint using the following rating system:

- Emotional high—they like or derive enjoyment from this touchpoint;
- Neutral emotions—the experience is just "fine" with nothing overly positive or negative about this touchpoint; or
- Emotional low—they dislike or derive dissatisfaction from this touchpoint.

We typically recommend assigning each audience segment a different color, particularly if the experiences are being mapped on one master timeline. What results is a master blueprint of the existing experience or journey of both your attendees and your exhibitors.

Completing this process is relatively simple. You and your team can anticipate the experience of your target audience segments. You can also take it a step further by inviting stakeholder groups to validate your assumptions.

Should you want to learn more about the journey mapping process, consider watching this brief, four-minute video presented by Jessica Dugan of Peer Insight.

Step 3: Envision

We now have some choices to make, but not before we review all of the data collected thus far. In Step 1 we gathered satisfaction data, along with a snapshot of event performance and engagement. In Step 2 we mapped the journeys of both our exhibitors and our attendees.

Taking into consideration those areas that could use improvement and any points along the journey maps that are tagged as emotional lows, it's time to establish goals. You've likely heard of SMART goals—those that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

And that's a good start, but really consider a shift in traditional measures of success to those intermediate goals or success measures that truly drive outcomes we've come to strive for, such as attendance and revenue.

Key Audiences	FROM Traditional Success Measures	TO New/Intermediate Success Measures
Meeting owner/association	Attendance achieved Revenue generated	Mission alignment Non-financial goals met (e.g., net promoter score) Membership lifecycle
Exhibitors/sponsors	Leads gathered Sales closed	Development of: • Brand awareness • Relationships • Sales pipeline
Participants/attendees	Work/life balance Wow factor achieved	Personal goals for: • Learning • Networking • Transferring (i.e., applying new ideas/connections to the workplace)

The traditional success measures resemble a more transactional model of business where the bottom line is the primary focus. Conversely, the new/intermediate success measures present a more relational business model that places heavy value on the development, maintenance, and deepening of relationships.

Establishing the right goals (e.g., facilitating a tradeshow experience aligned with the association's mission) should result in the design, development, and implementation of a must-attend industry event your members actually want to attend and participate in. It becomes less about convincing them they should attend and more about attracting them to the show because the value proposition is clear and compelling.

Based on these new goals/measures of success, you can then review the 50 tradeshow approaches presented throughout this eBook to identify those most likely to drive your desired experience. What results is a new and much more innovative tradeshow blueprint.

In addition to selecting the right approaches (maybe three to five), be sure to consider the infrastructure and support system needed to make these approaches successful. You may need to trigger one or more of the following:

- Floor plan redesign that optimizes flow among the various activities and exhibits.
- Effective coaching and mentoring of exhibitors to attain mutually beneficial outcomes, as well as a quality attendee experience.
- Greater communication and connection with attendees to help them customize and map out a unique roadmap that will meet their needs (given the increase in activities on the tradeshow floor).

A word of caution: Avoid simply cutting or pasting one or more new tradeshow approaches into this year's playbook. Contrary to popular belief, mimicry is not the sincerest form of flattery. Often, we witness a successful new idea firsthand and endeavor to bring it back to our organization. Unfortunately, we don't take into consideration the time and resources it takes to launch that approach.

Moreover, the approach may have been selected to fulfill a certain need, attain a specific goal, or create a desired outcome—all of which may be different than what you're trying to achieve. Don't be fooled by those approaches that are seemingly effortless. The best experiences are underpinned by strategy and planning—without exception.

Step 4: Launch

This is where the rubber meets the road. The launch is exactly what you think it is—actually implementing the new tradeshow blueprint. This can be done in one of two ways. Neither is right or wrong. It simply depends on the resources available and the risk tolerance of your association.

For those organizations with limited resources (including time, budget, and staff) or low risk tolerance, we would recommend a pilot or small-scale launch. This might include a new section of the tradeshow floor where the approach is implemented (leaving the balance of the show floor unaffected) or a small change to the overall event experience that impacts the full audience (e.g., name badges that better support networking and exhibitor–attendee introductions).

For those organizations with more robust resources or a greater risk tolerance, we would recommend a larger-scale launch. This might include completely reimagining the tradeshow floor plan to accommodate new activity pavilions or utilizing your registration platform to help attendees customize a tradeshow schedule based on their unique preferences.

With either approach, be sure to over communicate changes to all key stakeholders. Likewise, the emphasis should be placed on action vs. analysis, speed vs. long study times, engaging potential customers in the creation and design, and learning as you go—iterating as part of your continuous quality improvement. The only failure is in maintaining the status quo.

Step 5: Learn

The final step is to effectively evaluate and learn from your launch. Following are just some of the key questions you might want to ask post-event:

- How did we improve the experience/journey of our attendees? Exhibitors?
- How did we elevate meaningful connections and engagement between exhibitors and attendees?
- How did we learn/grow as an association? Industry?
- To what extent did we achieve our new/intermediate success measures?
- To what extent did we meet our traditional success measures?

With those questions asked and answered, and key learning summarized, it's time to start again at Step 1. Instead of developing a data summary from scratch, you should be poised to simply add the current year data to the history you've already developed. Similarly, each subsequent step should be iterative in nature.

We imagine your tradeshow journey will vacillate between evolution and revolution, where evolution represents the gradual development of your tradeshow experience from a simple to a more complex form and revolution represents a dramatic and wide-reaching change in the way your tradeshow works, is organized, or is viewed by your attendees and exhibitors.

In either approach, elevating the tradeshow experience will inevitably:

- Increase the number and quality of interactions on the show floor;
- Grow customer satisfaction scores;
- Build the reputation of the tradeshow, the association, and in turn, the industry;
- Earn the loyalty of both exhibitors and attendees;
- Create a buzz that supports both repeat and first-time attendance;
- Motivate the purchase of future programs, products, and services;
- Improve the bottom line of both the association and the exhibitors; and
- Save attendees time, money, and resources.

Resources & Organizations

Interested in learning even more about the (r)evolution of tradeshows? We've curated a list of just some of the resources we discovered in the research for this eBook. We'd also like to know what you're reading! Share with us on social media any tradeshow-related resources in your library (past or present) using #tradeshowrevolution.

Resourcess

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Organizations

Following is also a brief list of organizations you may wish to explore further. Each is engaged in the tradeshow discussion. Many are even conducting research on the tradeshow of the future and releasing their own research relative to this topic.

- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)
- Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR)
- Events Industry Council (EIC)
- Exhibition Services & Contractors Association (ESCA)
- Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association (HCEA)
- International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE)
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI)
- Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA)

Thought Leaders

Have a question or idea inspired by this eBook you'd like to bounce off us? Or maybe you'd like to have a deeper discussion about what a tradeshow redesign might look like for your organization? Be it a small test-drive within the preexisting context of your tradeshow or a complete redesign, let us know. We'd love to hear from you! And share your tradeshow success stories on social media using #tradeshowrevolution.

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Aaron's interest in reimagining tradeshows began in 2003 during his first association gig. Since then, Aaron has had the opportunity to collaborate with associations of all shapes, sizes, and industries to create dynamic and mutually beneficial experiences for exhibitors and attendees alike, all while growing both attendance and revenue.

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Lowell partners with organizations on strategic visioning and planning, creating stronger governance models, and reimagining value and engagement. Lowell frequently provides dynamic sessions to organizations—conducting deep-dive interviews and getting members and volunteers involved through experiential learning approaches. He currently serves as the Chair of the overseeing commission for the Certified Association Executive certification, and chaired ASAE's Task Force on CEO Pathways. He is the creator of a master-level learning series called Through the CEO Lens and Association Charrette—a co-creation retreat experience. His work on global efforts for associations has included experience across five continents, hundreds of volunteer groups, and all 50 states in the U.S.

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